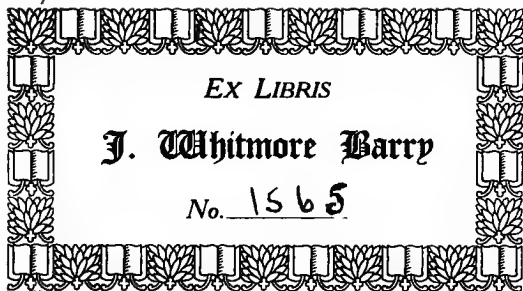


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THE POLITICIANS

THE POLITICIANS: A COMEDY, IN
FOUR ACTS, BY FRANK G. LAYTON
(‘STEPHEN ANDREW’)

LONDON: SIDGWICK & JACKSON, LTD.
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PERSONS OF THE PLAY

LORD SUNNINGHAM.

LADY SUNNINGHAM.

THE HON. PETER BALDWIN, *their son.*

LADY PATCHWAY.

ALICIA JORDAN.

CHARLES WENTOVER.

THE REV. JOHN BROWN.

BAGGS, *an Election Agent.*

ROOT, *a Politician.*

A WAITER.

SCENES

ACT I. *The Morning-room at Sunningham Towers.*

ACTS II., III., IV. *A Sitting-room in the Baldwin Arms
at Whitebridge, a Midland Manufacturing Town.*

THE POLITICIANS

ACT I

It is getting on for noon on a bright morning in late spring. The scene is the morning-room of Sunningham Towers, LORD SUNNINGHAM'S country house in Staffordshire. In the far wall are two French windows opening on to a well kept garden. Between them is a small writing-table, with a chair facing towards the left. In the left-hand wall is the fire-place, in which a fire of logs is burning. On either side of the fire-place are easy chairs; and there are other chairs and a couple of small tables scattered about the room. In the right-hand wall is the door, and, beyond, a book-case. There is a general appearance of affluence and comfort.

LADY SUNNINGHAM is sitting at the writing-table, busy with her morning correspondence. She is an amiable-looking, rather faded, quiet woman, nearer 50 than 40—not emotional: the sort of woman who, when first married, presents to her husband a

blank page, upon which he may write pretty much what he pleases. Apparently, LORD SUNNINGHAM has been content to write very little.

In an arm-chair on the far side of the fire is sitting LADY PATCHWAY, reading the "Morning Post." She is a jolly, rather fat, middle-aged woman, very keen on everything that is going on: much given to putting her finger into every pie in her neighbourhood.

LADY PATCHWAY. [*rustling the newspaper vigorously.*] Julia Sussex has got another girl. That makes five. Poor thing. Imagine five daughters, Susan.

LADY SUNNINGHAM. [*looking up.*] What did you say, Jane?

LADY PATCHWAY. Julia Sussex has another daughter. Such a pity that woman isn't a Chinese, or an Ancient Israelite. Then she could drown it. Or—no—it was the *boy* babies the ancient Israelites drowned, of course. Moses and the bulrushes—you remember. But I never had any head for Bible history. So puzzling. Cities of the Plain, and all that sort of thing.

She retires into the "Morning Post," while

LADY SUNNINGHAM *goes on with her writing.*

LADY PATCHWAY. [*suddenly.*] Susan—just listen—the Bishop of Hammersmith has been preaching about the sin of having no family. He's a bachelor, of course. Quite a saint, my dear. He sat next to me at the Jernyngham dinner the other day. We talked about the Divorce Laws, and he got absolutely horrifying. [*She pauses.*] I'm sure that man wears a hair shirt next his skin, and eats nothing but salt fish on Fridays, and lives entirely on hot cross buns all Lent. I shall introduce him to Julia Sussex. Five girls . . . !

*Once more she subsides into her paper ;
but evidently she finds it uninteresting, for
she throws it down very soon, and sits
forward.*

Susan, what have you been doing to that poor, dear Peter ?

LADY SUNNINGHAM. [*lays down her pen with a sigh.*] What do you mean, Jane ?

LADY PATCHWAY. [*severely.*] Why did you make him get engaged to Alicia Jordan ? She'll lead him a dog's life. She's intellectual. She reads Browning, and takes in "Votes for Women" regularly.

LADY SUNNINGHAM. But, Jane——

LADY PATCHWAY. Don't interrupt. If you interrupt I shall forget what I was going to say. Poor, dear Peter ! He's just like his father was at his age. Imagine what would have happened to Sunningham if he had married an intellectual woman. She would have made him miserable.

LADY SUNNINGHAM. [*forcibly.*] Well, Jane !

LADY PATCHWAY. Don't interrupt. There—I knew how it would be—I have forgotten where I was. Let me see—oh, yes—we were talking about Sunningham. *He* isn't intellectual. He married you, and he's as happy as can be—poking pigs in the ribs, and letting that bailiff of his swindle him. But, if he had married an intellectual woman he might have been a member of a Radical Cabinet by this time. Think of that, Susan. Think what you have saved him from. A man who loses money over agriculture at the rate he does would have been a public misfortune in the Cabinet.

LADY SUNNINGHAM. Really—Jane——

LADY PATCHWAY. [*waves her hand, and* LADY SUNNINGHAM *subsides.*] And yet, in spite of all that, you and Sunningham propose to marry that unfortunate boy to Alicia. Let me think—*how many Improvement Societies is it she*

belongs to? I never can remember. There ought to be a new Society for the Prevention of Improving Women. I shall start one at once. I will be President, and you will be Vice-President. We will begin with Alicia. [*She pauses, suddenly doubtful.*] I suppose that wouldn't do, though. You don't want to prevent Alicia: you want to encourage her.

LADY SUNNINGHAM. [*in a tone of mild protest.*] Really, Jane—what have you to say against Alicia?

LADY PATCHWAY. I have *nothing* to say against Alicia. [*Subsides into her chair, and reaches for the paper.*] I am very fond of her. She is a great friend of mine. But——

She drops the paper as the door opens, and PETER comes in. He is a very neat, pleasant looking man of twenty-five or so. He is dressed in a well-cut flannel suit, and has a small moustache.

PETER. [*looking about him affably, and closing the door.*] Good morning, Lady Patchway. Good morning, Mother.

LADY SUNNINGHAM. Peter, dear, you get later and later.

PETER. [*with great cheerfulness.*] Yes, don't I. You see, I'm getting older and older.

LADY PATCHWAY. I'm afraid you are dreadfully modern, Peter.

PETER. [*choosing a chair some way from the fire.*] Certainly I am modern. I have had a most expensive education.

LADY SUNNINGHAM, *evidently concluding that letter writing is an impossibility, pushes back her chair with some show of resignation and gets up, and goes out, PETER opening the door for her.*

LADY PATCHWAY. Come and sit close to me, Peter. I want to be amused.

PETER. Delighted. [*Drags chair to fire and sits down.*] How can I amuse you ?

LADY PATCHWAY. [*looking hard at him.*] I haven't congratulated you yet.

PETER. [*staring into the fire.*] No ? What on ?

LADY PATCHWAY. On your engagement, of course.

PETER. [*starting up.*] What ! But nobody knows anything about it. At least—I mean——

LADY PATCHWAY. Fiddlesticks ! Haven't you seen the "Morning Post" ? It's all there. *She picks up the paper, and reads aloud.*

"A marriage has been arranged between the Honourable Peter Baldwyn, only

son of Lord and Lady Sunningham, and Miss Alicia Jordan, the sole surviving child of the late Sir Edward Jordan."

What have you got to say to that, Peter ?

PETER. [*collapses into his chair.*] Good Lord ! So they've done it ! [*Recovering himself, and sitting forward.*] I beg your pardon, Lady Patchway—I mean, may I smoke ? Very nice, yes, thanks so much for your congratulations.

LADY PATCHWAY. [*sitting bolt upright, and looking at him severely.*] Peter !

PETER. Yes.

LADY PATCHWAY. [*still more severely.*] Is that true ?

PETER. [*shrugs his shoulders.*] The "Morning Post" says so ; so I suppose it is.

LADY PATCHWAY. [*thoroughly roused.*] But, you dreadful boy, what do you mean ? Are you engaged to Alicia, or aren't you ?

PETER. Please, may I smoke.

LADY PATCHWAY. Of course you may smoke. Answer my question. Remember, I am your godmother ; so I have a perfect right to ask.

PETER. [*very affably—jumping up.*] So you are. You gave me a silver christening mug. And, now I come to think of it, I don't believe I ever said thank you. [*Makes a profound bow.*]

Thank you, Lady Patchway, for my pretty mug.

LADY PATCHWAY. Peter, I've a good mind to smack you. Are you engaged to Alicia, or aren't you ?

PETER. [*lights cigarette, and walks up and down the room.*] Alicia and I have been engaged ever since we were in the nursery. You see, her parents died when she was a baby ; so she's an heiress—a regular heroine of melodrama sort of person ; and, unfortunately, her estates are next to ours. [*He stops abruptly by LADY PATCHWAY'S chair.*] It's just like a bit out of a penny-a-week serial, isn't it ? Of course, our wicked parents—I mean mine : her's, being dead, had nothing to do with it—fixed things up. So there we are. But I wonder how the deuce—I beg your pardon—I mean, how the “Morning Post ” got hold of it.

LADY PATCHWAY. I see. [*Warningly.*] Alicia is very intellectual, Peter.

PETER. [*very cheerfully.*] Yes, isn't she ! Alicia's a regular glutton for culture and all that. [*He walks once up and down the room, and halts before LADY PATCHWAY.*] Between ourselves, Lady Patchway, she's a bit above my weight. But I expect we'll rub along all right. She will

be able to tell me how to vote when I get into the Lords.

LADY PATCHWAY. [*solemnly.*] She will do much more than that, Peter. She will tell you how to vote when you get into the Commons.

PETER. [*startled.*] Eh! What? Me in the Commons! But I'm not going into the Commons.

LADY PATCHWAY. [*soothingly.*] My poor, dear Peter—you wait and see.

PETER. [*excitedly.*] But—I say. Lady Patchway—

LADY PATCHWAY. [*impressively.*] Peter, Lady Sussex has just presented her husband with a fifth daughter. Just think of it. *Five* girls, and not a single boy. What will you do if Alicia presents *you* with five daughters?

PETER. [*rubbing his head, ruefully.*] Alicia! Five girls! But, Lady Patchway, Alicia won't ever have five daughters. She's intellectual. I don't suppose she'll ever have so much as one daughter. You don't know Alicia if you think that of her.

LADY PATCHWAY. [*hugely pleased.*] I shall have to get the Bishop of Hammersmith to speak to you—and to Alicia.

PETER. Bishop of Hammersmith! Never heard of him. Hullo, here's Charles.

The door opens, and CHARLES WENTOVER comes in. He is a rather tall, very dark, clean-shaven man—about 35. He, too, is neatly dressed in a well-cut flannel suit.

CHARLES. [*crossing over.*] Good morning, Lady Patchway.

LADY PATCHWAY. Have you come to congratulate Peter, Mr Wentover? The engagement is announced in the "Morning Post."

CHARLES. [*with polite interest.*] Oh. Which engagement?

PETER *frowns hard at CHARLES.*

LADY PATCHWAY. [*getting up and gathering together her possessions—a little bag, handkerchief, etc.*] Peter and Alicia Jordan. Talk to him gently, Mr Wentover. I am going to leave him to you now. I wanted him to amuse me; but he isn't a bit amusing this morning. [*Maliciously.*] I'm afraid he's horribly in love! Good-bye.

CHARLES *opens the door, and* LADY PATCHWAY *bustles out.*

PETER. [*throwing himself into the chair she has just left.*] Damn!

CHARLES. [*turning to him.*] What's up?

PETER. They've done it now. Shoved it

into the "Morning Post." It's all up with me now, Charles.

CHARLES. But what have you to complain about? You have been engaged to Miss Jordan for long enough.

PETER. [*stretching his legs out straight towards the fire and lighting a fresh cigarette.*] Engaged! Yes. But *now* I shall have to get *married* to her. One always has to get married after a "Morning Post" notice. If you don't, they shove in a nasty stinging little announcement that makes you feel a worm for ever afterwards. Curse all newspapers!

CHARLES. But what's the matter with getting married?

He sits on the arm of another chair and also lights a cigarette.

Between you, you'll be able to rub along. Miss Jordan has something like £30,000 a year, hasn't she!

PETER. [*sitting up.*] Charles, I always thought you were a bit of a moralist.

CHARLES. Well, what then?

PETER. Yet you propose to spoil two people's happiness for £30,000 a year! I'm surprised at you.

CHARLES. What the dickens do you mean?

PETER. [*getting up, and beginning to walk about once more.*] Just this. Alicia is one of the best. She and I are no end pals. We've been pals ever since we could walk. We used to share our penn'orths of chocolate, and all that. You know. But—oh, dash it all! Imagine us married. Alicia is intellectual. She goes in for movements. She has ideas. I loathe movements, and I haven't any use for ideas. When I want to go shooting, she will drag me off to a meeting of the Humanitarian League. If I want to go racing, she will try to rope me into the Anti-Gambling Society. She jolly well won't succeed; and then there'll be a row. Alicia's all right as a pal—I can rot her about her Leagues and things now; but Alicia as a wife will be another pair of shoes.

CHARLES. But you are engaged to her. You've got no business to be engaged to a girl if you don't intend to marry her.

PETER. All right, old chap. Don't get worried. Alicia understands perfectly well. But that beastly notice upsets everything. The wedding presents will be coming along before we know where we are. [*He halts before CHARLES.*] Think of it, Charles. Wedding presents! What the dickens shall I do with wedding presents?

CHARLES. Hire a detective or two to keep an eye on them, and get a few tame newspaper men to write about them. That's the usual course. The general public likes to read about the wedding presents of the Nobility.

PETER. Don't be an ass.

CHARLES. It will do you a lot of good to get married, Peter. You will realize that you have a stake in the country. You will help your wife to open bazaars, and all that sort of thing. In that way you will qualify yourself for the seat in the House of Lords which a grateful country is keeping warm for you—Heaven knows why.

PETER. [*walking up and down.*] Jolly sort of prospect, isn't it ?

CHARLES. [*looking hard at him.*] For you, or for the country, Peter ? You've got to be a legislator some day, whether you want to or not. The sooner you get through the preliminary stages the better. To be a really useful member of the House of Lords you must be so well off that you realize the true sacredness of Property. Miss Jordan will help you to be really well off.

PETER. [*halting before CHARLES.*] Pretty sort of humbug you are. You used to be some kind of Socialist. I've heard you curse property

owners often enough. But there's some sense in what you say, seeing the sort of father I've got. There won't be much left for me if he goes on playing at farming at his present rate. The old boy says it's his duty to what he calls "foster agriculture." It's deucedly expensive. Judging from him, being a Peer isn't a paying profession. If it wasn't for Whitebridge—— Hullo, here he is.

The door opens, and LORD SUNNINGHAM comes in. He is a short, energetic man, irascible, clean shaven except for a big moustache, dressed like a farmer, in brown tail coat, with enormous pockets, leggings, bowler hat, etc.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. Well, Peter—wasting your time, as usual?

PETER. [*nodding.*] Good morning. How are the pigs? And I'm not wasting my time. Charles is improving my mind.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*coming over towards the fire—gruffly.*] Very good of him. He's got a hard job. [*Stands with his back to the fire.*] I've got something to say to you, Peter. No, don't go, Charles. [*CHARLES has made for the door.*] You had better hear it.

PETER. [*interested.*] What is it, Father?

I've seen the "Morning Post." Anything to do with that ?

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*a little taken aback.*] What the deuce are you jabbering about the "Morning Post" ? I don't read the "Morning Post." No, Sir, what I want to say has nothing to do with the "Morning Post." I was in London yesterday.

PETER. [*sitting down.*] Oh, were you ? I hadn't heard.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*impressively.*] And I saw the Party Whips.

PETER. [*with a show of polite interest.*] Yes ? I hope you enjoyed yourself.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*glaring at him.*] I didn't. I found them very expensive. But I fixed it. There is going to be a bye-election at Whitebridge, and you are to be our candidate.

PETER. [*starting up.*] The deuce I am !

LORD SUNNINGHAM. You are to go down to-morrow. It took me some time to get those fellows to consent. They'd got some carpet-bagger they wanted to run in. Some barrister-person. But I talked to 'em straight. I shewed 'em I had a claim on the place. Hang it all ! I have a claim. I own most of it. I couldn't keep up the Towers, and encourage British

agriculture, if it wasn't for the rents I draw from Whitebridge. They made me pay a bit, but I convinced them in the end. You are to go down to-morrow, Peter.

PETER. But—I say—which Party am I to stand for ?

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*spluttering.*] Which Party, Sir ? There is only one Party for a gentleman. You are a Tory, Sir—like the rest of your family. What do you mean by asking “ which Party ” ? You are to strike a blow for Property, Peter : for Decency : for the old families : for your Church and for your King.

He glares fiercely round the room.

PETER. [*with great cheerfulness, standing in the middle of the room with his hands in his pockets.*] Right oh ! I'll strike a blow in the sacred cause of Property. But I'm blessed if I know how it's done.

He turns to CHARLES, who is sitting down, and smoking a cigarette, by the door.

You'll have to come and see me through, Charles.

CHARLES. Oh, I'll come. I expect it will be rather amusing.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*fuming.*] Amusing ! It will be a great deal more than amusing. [*He*

takes a step forward.] We are in the midst of a life and death struggle, Sir. If the Propertied Classes don't bestir themselves they will topple to everlasting smash.

Warming to his work, and moving out into the middle of the room.

The Institution of Private Property, Sir—the Institution which has made this Empire what it is—is tottering to its fall. Every Radical scallywag thinks he has a right to chuck his handful of mud at it. Yes, Sir. [*He glares at CHARLES.*] I said every Radical scallywag, and I meant every Radical scallywag.

He pauses, rather out of breath, and evidently short of terms of abuse.

CHARLES. [*quietly.*] I'm sure you did.

PETER. [*throwing himself into a chair.*] They are rather a lot of rotters. At least, I suppose they are. Those newspaper johnnies say so, and they ought to know.

CHARLES. [*quietly.*] Which lot of newspaper johnnies, Peter? You see, it's only one-half of them that call the Radicals rotters. The other half seem to regard them as recent importations from Heaven. Such a lot depends on which sort of newspaper you read regularly.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*fiercely, retreating to the*

hearthrug.] Of course the Radicals are a gang of thieves. They are talking now about taxing my land values, or some such rot. They say I have no right to take rent out of Whitebridge and pay no rates. *Rates*, Sir! They expect *me* to pay towards the upkeep of that unspeakable town. Have you ever been to Whitebridge? It is unfit for a gentleman to live in.

CHARLES. [*grimly, getting up and walking about the room.*] So I have heard. They say that all who are rich enough have moved out into the country suburbs. But—er [*he stops and faces* LORD SUNNINGHAM]—what about the people who are not rich enough?

LORD SUNNINGHAM. Of course they have moved out. They would be fools if they didn't. Whitebridge is good enough for the common people; but it isn't good enough for people with Property.

PETER. [*airily.*] Shall I tell 'em that when I go electioneering? I wonder what the common people will say.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*deeply disgusted.*] Good Lord! I knew you were a fool, but I didn't know you were such an almighty fool!

CHARLES. [*strolling up to him and patting his shoulder.*] Peter, my boy, you've a lot to

learn. Don't you know that it is extremely dangerous for a sucking M.P. to speak the truth ?

PETER. [*getting up and shrugging his shoulders.*] Is it ? How interesting ! I wonder what I shall find to talk about.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*grimly.*] The less you say, when you get there, the better.

PETER. But I thought parliamentary candidates had to make speeches.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. Of course [*fuming*] they have to make speeches. *You* will have to make speeches—loads of them. But that doesn't mean that you have got to *say* anything in particular.

PETER. Oh !

CHARLES. If you will allow me to say so, Lord Sunningham, you—er—a member of the House of Lords, have an unusually keen grasp of the duties of a House of Commons man. What you say sums it up beautifully.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*pleased.*] Thank you, Charles. I know a thing or two ; even if I belong to—what was it that Radical spouter chap called it the other day ? The House of Fossils. And I hope you will take this youngster in hand and put him through his paces. I

don't want him to make a bigger fool of himself than he need.

CHARLES. I'll do my best.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. I want him to win this election. Why, in the old days my family *owned* that borough. We had it in our pocket. We always put our man in, and we saw to it that he voted as he was told. There wasn't any of your democratic nonsense in those days—Jack as good as his master, and all that sort of thing. No, Sir, a gentleman was a gentleman in those days. They used to shew proper respect for my family then; but if I were to walk through the streets of Whitebridge to-morrow, hardly a soul would recognize me; and if he did he wouldn't get out of my way.

PETER. [*airily.*] Why should he?

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*staring aghast.*] What? What's that you ask? Why should he?

PETER. Yes. Why should he? You never do anything for the place, so far as I know, except collect your rents.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. Peter! Here, Charles, what the devil have you been doing with him?

CHARLES. I? Nothing. I'm afraid he's been *thinking* for himself. It is very dangerous

for anybody to think for himself—especially a Parliamentary candidate.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. You are quite right. It is. They never thought much when I was a young man. They left it to their elders to do all the thinking for them.

PETER. [*rather vindictively, turning and facing* LORD SUNNINGHAM.] You've been doing some thinking for me, it seems. Some of my nice kind elders have been thinking about getting me married. It's in the "Morning Post." And now they're thinking about shoving me into the House of Commons—if they can work it. I don't see what you've got to complain about.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*severely.*] I have a great deal to complain about, if you have taken to thinking. Thinking isn't one of the family traditions; and the sooner you realize that the better.

PETER. [*drily.*] Then what did you send me to Harrow and Oxford for?

LORD SUNNINGHAM. To make a man of you, of course. They taught you to play the game, didn't they?

PETER. [*turning away and walking up and down the room.*] Oh—yes. They taught me to

play the game. I'll go through with it all right. Don't you worry. I'll be a Tory candidate—the sort of Tory candidate you want. I won't tell the truth—not on purpose.

He stops abruptly before CHARLES.

Charles, you'd better begin coaching me at once. I've drifted into a beastly habit of saying what I mean. You've got to cure me of that.

CHARLES *looks at him with a grim smile on his face. Before he can reply the door opens, and LADY PATCHWAY comes in.*

LADY PATCHWAY. [*very cheerily, crossing towards the fire.*] Good morning, Sunningham. What are you doing to my poor, dear Peter now? You look as savage as one of your own silly old bulls. How are the pigs?

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*turning a chair toward her.*] The pigs are quite well, thank you. Won't you come and sit by the fire?

LADY PATCHWAY. [*sitting down.*] Of course I'm going to sit by the fire. What is the matter?

PETER. [*going up to her.*] You were quite right, Lady Patchway. I'm a Parliamentary candidate.

LADY PATCHWAY. [*wagging her head.*] Ah—so you've managed it, Sunningham. I

hope it cost you a lot of money. [*To CHARLES.*] Is he still desperately in love, Mr Wentover ?

CHARLES. Desperately.

LADY PATCHWAY. Poor Peter ? What are your Party colours ?

PETER. I haven't the faintest idea. I didn't even know which was my Party till just now.

CHARLES. [*who has crossed over to the other side of the room.*] Orange and red. They've just settled that at headquarters. They thought it would be a good plan to have the same colours everywhere.

LADY PATCHWAY. [*sitting up in horror.*] Orange and red ! My dear Peter ! Imagine me in orange and red !

CHARLES. Orange to shew they love the Union ; red—because that's the Empire colour. You know, it's the colour they paint the maps with.

LADY PATCHWAY. Most ingenious. And what colours have the other Party chosen ?

CHARLES. Green and white. Green to please the Irish ; and white to shew they are the Party of Purity.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*with venom.*] White

flag, you mean. White—because they mean to chuck up the sponge.

LADY PATCHWAY. Green and white ! Imagine me in green and white at my age. [*Turning to LORD SUNNINGHAM.*] And you are going to send Peter to Whitebridge to stand for the Sacred Cause of Purity ?

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*hurriedly.*] Good Heavens ! No. Peter isn't going to sport the green and white. What do you take me for ?

LADY PATCHWAY. [*laughing.*] Of course not. What a silly old woman I am becoming. But I never can remember which is your side, Sunningham. Politics are so confusing to us poor weak women. [*She twinkles all over.*] So silly of the Suffragettes to mix themselves up in what they don't understand. They ought to leave Politics to people who can understand them—people like you and Peter.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*startled.*] Me ! Peter ! My dear Jane. You don't think *I* soil my hands with Politics, I hope. I subscribe a bit to the Party Funds, that's all——

LADY PATCHWAY. [*very pleased with herself.*] And offer your only son as a burnt sacrifice. That's pious of you. Just like Jacob, or Moses, or whoever it was. . . . Only he found his

neighbour's ewe lamb caught in a bush, and sacrificed it instead. So clever of him to think of it.

PETER. [*mischievously.*] Lady Patchway, I shall have to get that Bishop to talk to *you*.

LADY PATCHWAY. [*shaking her head at him.*] Don't be flippant, Peter. And there won't be any lamb to take *your* place.

PETER *shrugs his shoulders and laughs.*

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*seized with a sudden idea.*] Look here, Charles, if you are going to take Peter in hand, you had better begin at once. You will have to go down to Whitebridge to-morrow. The Election is in three weeks. I'm going round the Home Farm. Will you come, Jane? You said you wanted to see the young pigs.

LADY PATCHWAY. Did I? Very silly of me. I don't a bit want to see the pigs. I don't take any interest at all in pigs—except at breakfast-time. Such hard luck, isn't it, Mr Wentover? To-day you are a curly-tailed little pig: to-morrow you are curly little bits of bacon. The ways of Providence are inscrutable. [*She gets up.*] But I'll come. A man who serves his country—isn't that what you call it, Sunningham?—by losing money over agriculture at

the rate you do, ought to be encouraged. Come along.

She leads the way to the door, and she and

LORD SUNNINGHAM *go out.*

CHARLES. [*crossing over and sitting in arm chair. PETER stands with his back to the fire.*] Well ?

PETER. Nice state of things, isn't it ?

CHARLES. Very nice, indeed. We are going to have an interesting three weeks.

PETER. H'm. Yes.

CHARLES. How long is it you have been a Tory ?

PETER. [*laughs.*] Oh—about a quarter of an hour.

CHARLES. Good. Recent converts are usually keen.

PETER. I'm keen enough. What bothers me is that I don't know what I'm keen about. I suppose I'm a Tariff Reformer.

CHARLES. Certainly you are. Tariff Reform is the chief line down at Whitebridge.

PETER. That's awkward. I don't even know what Tariff Reform is.

CHARLES. Nor does anyone else. You needn't worry about that.

PETER. But I shall have to talk about it.

CHARLES. That's all right. It won't be the first time you have talked about what you don't understand ; and, if you get into the House of Commons, it won't be the last.

PETER. But, hang it all, they'll put me up on platforms, and they'll expect me to keep going for a bit. How am I to do it ?

CHARLES. They'll always give you a Chairman ; and he'll love to hear his own voice. Listen to him carefully, and say the same as he does, in different words.

PETER. [*not satisfied.*] It doesn't sound very promising. Isn't there any other line I can go on.

CHARLES. Plenty. There's the Empire——

PETER. [*much cheered.*] By George, so there is. Good old Empire ! I tell you what, Charles, I'll have a Union Jack pocket-handkerchief. Then I can pull it out and wave it at the critical moment. That ought to fetch 'em.

CHARLES. [*doubtfully.*] It might—towards the end. But you must go a bit slow at first. Some of your platform crowd will be solemn old birds, who take everything dreadfully seriously. You'll have to be careful with them. It isn't a music-hall show you are in for, remember.

PETER. [*nodding.*] Right oh. I'll be decorous. I'll talk about our great and glorious Empire on which the sun never sets. Good old sun! And I'll talk about our great and glorious Navy. At least—I say, Charles, have I got to say it's great and glorious; or ought I to describe it as utterly worthless? I've never been able to make out. Those newspaper jokers seem to have such very varying views on the subject.

CHARLES. Call it glorious; but don't call it great. Then you'll be safe. Go on—what else will you say?

PETER. Oh, I don't know. We are for the Church, aren't we?

CHARLES. You most certainly are for the Church. You will have to be very careful how you tackle the parsons.

PETER. [*with enthusiasm.*] Good old Church! Good old parsons! I'll agree with them all the way.

CHARLES. [*getting up and standing by him.*] You mustn't overdo it, Peter, my son. It isn't difficult to put your foot in it badly when you get talking to parsons. You see, they've got their own particular point of view, and it isn't always easy for an impenitent

young blackguard like you to find out what it is.

PETER. [*very cheerfully.*] Impenitent young blackguard yourself ! I am a sound Churchman—like all other Tory candidates.

CHARLES. Glad to hear it. But, as I say, don't overdo it. You had better go rather pointedly to the Parish Church on Sundays ; but whatever you do, don't get drawn into ecclesiastical politics. There are sure to be two or three warring factions in Whitebridge, and it will be your job to get them all to vote for you. So be wary.

PETER. I'll be wary. Hullo, who's there ?

The door opens, and ALICIA JORDAN comes in.

PETER. Oh. Alicia. Good. [*He crosses towards her.*]

ALICIA *is a calm, capable looking girl. She is very neatly dressed in tailor-made clothes.*

ALICIA. I've heard the news.

PETER. [*starting back.*] What news ? Have you seen the "Morning Post" ?

ALICIA. [*going over to the fire and warming her hands.*] I didn't see it in the "Morning Post" ; but they have told me you are to go to Whitebridge.

PETER. Oh—have they? Rather a lark, isn't it? Charles and I are just drawing up the plan of campaign. You had better come too. You might write my speeches. [*Enthusiastic at the idea.*] By Jove, yes, you *must* come. You'd be no end useful. Wouldn't she, Charles? She could tackle the parsons.

ALICIA. [*getting up from the fire, and turning to him with a smile.*] You forget—I'm only a woman. Politics isn't a fit game for women. *We* don't know anything about it.

PETER. Well, neither do I. But that doesn't matter. I'm going to have a shot at it.

CHARLES. As a matter of fact, Miss Jordan, he knows a good deal more than I thought; so much, indeed, that he doesn't want me for a teacher. I'm off.

He crosses to the door, and goes out.

PETER. [*looking after him.*] Rum chap, Charles. [*Turning to ALICIA.*] I say, have you seen that beastly notice in the "Morning Post"?

ALICIA. [*grimly.*] I have.

PETER. Infernal cheek, I call it. I was quite content to go on being engaged, weren't you?

ALICIA. Quite.

PETER. What I mean is—oh, hang it all, I suppose we shall have to get married some

time. But I don't want to get tied up yet—do you ?

ALICIA. [*shaking her head vigorously.*] Not in the least.

PETER. [*dolefully.*] But now we shall have to fix things definitely. Of course it will be awfully jolly when we are settled down, and all that ; but what I mean is, there isn't any tearing hurry.

ALICIA. Not the slightest.

PETER. [*glances at her suspiciously.*] I say, Alicia, you do want to marry me, don't you ?

ALICIA. [*turning away from him and fidgeting with the flowers in a vase.*] Why else should I be engaged to you ?

PETER. Oh, that isn't your fault. They arranged all that for us, long enough ago. I don't quite know how they managed it ; but I can't remember the time when we weren't engaged. [*With a quick laugh.*] Do you remember when I smashed your best doll ?

ALICIA. Perfectly. I smacked your face immediately afterwards. [*She faces him.*]

PETER. So you did. And then we fought it out, and made it up afterwards ; and we had a first-class funeral for the doll. I dug the grave and made the coffin, and you made the wreath. I did the service, and you were chief mourner.

ALICIA. And shed real tears into the grave. They *were* real, Peter—I loved Jessica.

PETER. Jessica. Was that her name?

ALICIA. Yes. And—I never told you—I went and dug her up afterwards. I got a new head for her. And I changed her name—I wonder how it was you never found out.

PETER. The deuce you did! Just like you. You always were a bit too deep for me.

ALICIA. That's the way of women, Peter. We put up with a lot; but we generally score in the long run. I won that fight, you know.

PETER. [*hotly.*] Oh, well, I couldn't hit you back. You were a girl——

ALICIA. Couldn't you! But you just jolly well did. And you pulled my hair. I know I thought it mean of you. Yours was so short I couldn't get my fingers into it.

PETER. [*laughing and turning away.*] I suppose I was rather a little beast. I wonder whether we shall fight when we are married.

ALICIA. I wonder. [*pensively.*] People do sometimes.

PETER. Rather risky—marriage.

ALICIA. [*speaking slowly.*] V e r y risky.

PETER. [*turning sharply on her.*] I say—

we've been pals for years and years. I hope we'll go on being pals.

ALICIA. [*warmly.*] Peter! Of course we shall.

PETER. In spite of that "Morning Post" notice? "A marriage has been arranged . . ."?

ALICIA. [*emphatically.*] That marriage will take place when *we* choose.

PETER. [*looking closely at her.*] And when will *you* choose?

ALICIA. [*with a laugh.*] I will marry you when you are Member for Whitebridge, Peter.

PETER. [*very cheerfully.*] You will?

ALICIA. I will. Is it a bargain?

She holds out her hand.

PETER. [*seizing it, and shaking it up and down vigorously.*] By Jove, it is!

CURTAIN

ACT II

It is afternoon, a week later. The scene is a private sitting-room in the Baldwyn Arms, the principal hotel of Whitebridge—a strenuous, grimy, thoroughly unlovely Midland manufacturing town. It is a dull room, gloomily furnished, with faded wall-paper, pictures in tarnished frames, and shabby chairs. In the far wall is a single window, and to the left of the window is an uninviting sofa. Before the window is a round table with a stained and faded red table-cloth. In the left-hand wall is the fire-place, with a fire burning; and above it is a mirror in a red plush frame. In the right-hand wall is the door, and, beyond the door, a small side-board.

Evidently business is not very flourishing at the Baldwyn Arms.

CHARLES WENTOVER is reading a newspaper, and smoking a pipe, in an arm-chair in front of the fire.

There is a knock at the door.

CHARLES. [*looking round.*] Come in.

THE REV. JOHN BROWN *enters. He is a well-built, useful looking parson, between 30 and 40, dressed in a worn cassock and cloak. CHARLES jumps up in pleased surprise, and hurries towards him.*

CHARLES. What! John Brown! Where in the name of all that's wonderful did you spring from?

BROWN. [*shaking hands.*] I heard you were in Whitebridge, so I came to look you up. I live here.

CHARLES. You—in Whitebridge. It's good to see you again, John. Come and sit down and smoke, and tell me all about yourself. I suppose you are still trying to convert the slums.

BROWN. [*taking off his cloak.*] Yes—I'm still trying to convert the slums. It's a strenuous job. I've got a mission district—all on my own. That is to say [*he sits down deliberately*], I'm not exactly on my own. I am, nominally, under the direction of the Vicar of this town.

He pulls out a pipe and slowly proceeds to fill it.

He doesn't put a spoke in my wheel more often than once a week.

CHARLES. [*standing in front of the fire and looking affectionately at him.*] Very moderate of him. I expect you worry him a bit at times.

BROWN. I suppose I do. [*He looks round for matches.*] You see—I'm modern; and he—well, he isn't. He is a most worthy Vicar.

CHARLES. Yes—I've met him. He struck me as—most worthy. But never mind your Vicar. Tell me about yourself. How long have you been here?

BROWN. Eighteen months.

CHARLES. Good slummy district?

BROWN. Oh yes, it's slummy enough.

CHARLES. With a flock consisting entirely of rogues.

BROWN. No, my flock does not consist of rogues. I wish it did. They are mostly fools—like most other slum people. If only they were rogues I could do something with them.

CHARLES. Poor old John! Same old trouble!

BROWN. [*sitting forward.*] I should think it was the same old trouble. The slum-folk are double-dyed fools. If they weren't they would go and smash up some of the conventional respectable people who run the slums. If they would do that, things would move a bit.

CHARLES. [*laughing.*] Same old John ! Still trying to revolutionize the world ?

BROWN. [*smoking furiously.*] Of course. That's what I'm for. I'm a Christian priest. Every Christian priest is a revolutionary in theory. [*Drily.*] Most of 'em don't get beyond the theory stage, though. I'm an actual practising revolutionary.

CHARLES. What have you done ?

BROWN. Made quite a lot of my boys wash behind their ears more than once a week. Taught some of 'em to box without losing their tempers. Scared all the old women district-visitors out of the place. [*He pauses and laughs.*] They are awfully cross with me. You see, I got to work preaching Truth from the pulpit ; and they couldn't stand that.

CHARLES. No—that's a pretty dangerous thing to do. What did you say ?

BROWN. [*lying back in his chair.*] I preached about spring cleaning. I told them they didn't know any more about it than an old tom-cat. I suggested to them that they would sack a housemaid who swept all the dirt into a dark corner and left it there ; and I proceeded to draw the moral. You know—it's as obvious as Charing Cross Station. I told them they ought

to be ashamed of themselves for sweeping all the Social dirt into the slums and back streets, and leaving it there, and then putting on their best frocks and going out to tea and Browning. They were displeased.

CHARLES. They would be. Your methods are a bit direct.

BROWN. What's the good of using crooked methods ?

CHARLES. And what did your excellent Vicar say ?

BROWN. He said lots of things.

They smoke in silence for a bit.

I say, Charles, it's good to have a sensible person to talk to. What ages it is since the Oxford days. You've no idea how I hunger for a good straight talk now and then.

CHARLES. Poor old John ! A bit lonely in the slums ?

BROWN. [*emphatically.*] Horribly. A slum parson—when he has time to think about it—is about the most lonely person alive. Maybe it's worse for a country doctor ; but I don't know. [*Suddenly changing the subject.*] How long are you staying ? The Election's in a fortnight, isn't it ?

CHARLES. Yes. I've got a fortnight. I'm seeing it through.

BROWN. That's good. I shall come and look you up a lot. But—why are you on the side of the—the side you are on? That used not to be your side.

CHARLES. [*shrugging his shoulders.*] Oh, I haven't got a side. I'm bear-leading the candidate. He's a nice boy, John. I rather fancy he is learning a good deal more than his dear papa bargained for. He will be in directly, and then we will have tea. It will do him good to meet you.

BROWN. Think so? His friends wouldn't agree with you. I'm supposed to be rather a violent sort of Radical.

CHARLES. Yes, I know. [*Earnestly.*] But you have lived here some time. You know the sort of life the people lead. You can tell him the things he ought to hear—not the kind of rot the politicians deal in.

BROWN. H'm—yes. And what then?

CHARLES. I don't know yet.

BROWN. What do you propose doing with your boy?

CHARLES. Educate him; or, better still, leave him to educate himself. He will get bored with all this Election nonsense before the three

weeks are up ; and he will go nosing round for amusement. I should like you to provide it.

There is a crash on the door.

That sounds rather like him.

The door flies open, and PETER, excited, comes in, throwing his hat on the table.

PETER. [*very loud.*] Hullo, my noble instructor, I've had the devil of a time.

[Suddenly he catches sight of BROWN, and subsides.]

I beg your pardon, Charles. I didn't know you had a visitor.

CHARLES. That's all right. It's only John Brown. Come and be introduced to him.

PETER. [*crossing over and shaking hands.*] How do you do. I have heard of you from Charles.

BROWN. [*smiling.*] And I have just been hearing of you from the same source. I am very glad to meet you.

PETER. [*throwing himself into a chair, and lighting a cigarette.*] I have been having tea with the Mayoress, Charles, and the Vicaress. You never saw such a pair. They are a couple of dear old things, of course, and dead keen on having me for Member—I can't imagine why. But—— !

CHARLES. Yes ? Go on, Peter.

PETER. [*with a laugh.*] Well, the Mayoress splashed H's all over me, and the Vicaress ferreted round for my Church opinions. Church opinions, Charles ! Me !

Suddenly he remembers BROWN.

. . . I beg your pardon [*to* BROWN].

BROWN. Please don't.

PETER. Oh, well, the dear old thing asked most affectionately after my mother. Met her once at a bazaar, it seems, and hopes to meet her again when I'm Member. And then the Vicar came in.

BROWN. [*amused.*] And how did you get on with him ?

PETER. Rippingly. Charles, after I've done down here you shall lecture me on the sinfulness of hypocrisy. It seems I'm a Pillar of the Establishment. Can you tell me anything about the Establishment, Mr Brown ? It might come in useful.

BROWN. I can—lots. But I won't. You wouldn't find it at all useful.

PETER. Oh ! [*He looks surprised.*] Aren't you for it ? I gathered from the Vicar that some parsons aren't. He wasn't polite about them. In fact, he said they were doing the Devil's

work. He's a free-speaking old bird. Charles, why the deuce don't they bring tea ?

CHARLES *rings the bell.*

Then he's dead nuts on Denominational Religious Instruction in Day Schools. I haven't the haziest notion what it is ; but I'm for it. And I'm up against Simple Bible Teaching, whatever that is. Charles, you were quite right when you said the Parson in Politics is the very devil—— [*Once more he remembers BROWN.*] Oh, dash it ! I've done it again. I beg your pardon.

BROWN. [*waving his hand.*] I assure you it is infinitely refreshing to hear you talk. We parsons so seldom hear the laity say what they really think.

CHARLES. Not even in the slums ?

BROWN. Not even in the slums. They are just as artificial before us there as they are anywhere else.

PETER. [*sitting up abruptly.*] I say—you live in the slums, don't you ? I wonder whether you can tell me what they think of me down there. I can't quite understand why they don't come and heave bricks at me ; but then, you see, I don't know much about them yet.

CHARLES *looks at him with great interest.*

BROWN. I don't think I'll tell you what they think—yet. What they say is something that is by no means polite. But I'll tell you what they will do. [*He pauses.*]

PETER. [*very keen.*] Yes? What will they do?

BROWN. They will vote for you, of course.

PETER. [*standing up.*] But—why? What single thing that I'm supposed to advocate do they care one tinker's button for? I'm supposed to stand in defence of Property. I'm shoved up as a sort of buttress—yes, Charles, you can scoff; but it's jolly well true—between the Classes and the Masses.

He turns and throws his cigarette into the fire in disgust.

It's a rotten game.

BROWN. [*quietly and earnestly.*] That's why they will vote for you. The slums venerate Property—they make quite a lot out of it. And—your Party leaves them alone. They *loathe* the people who are always tinkering at them. The average Liberal has a passion for Inspectors: the slum-folk haven't.

PETER. I see. At least, I think I do. What do you mean by Inspectors?

BROWN. Oh—everything. Sanitary Inspec-

tors, School Inspectors, Cruelty Inspectors, Policemen, District Visitors—all sorts of people who want the poor to live according to the standard of the Lower Middle Classes. The slum-folk wouldn't live according to the standard of the Lower Middle Classes if you paid them. It would bore them to tears.

PETER. [*ruefully.*] It would bore me to tears, too.

CHARLES. It would. Go on, John.

BROWN. [*warming to his work.*] Those dear, kind, stupid, Social Reforming people never will learn that what the slum-folk want is, to be left alone. They've got their own code of morals—very much like the code of Belgravia; and it isn't such a bad working code as it sounds. They are a bit promiscuous in sex-matters, and they drink too much when they get the chance, and they prefer living on other people to working themselves. But they provide the Empire with first-class fighting men, and they don't try to shove their ideas down other people's throats.

CHARLES. Same old John! You haven't changed a bit. No wonder you aren't popular with the respectable.

A WAITER. [*knocks at the door and comes in.*]

To PETER.] Mr Baggs wishes to speak to you, Sir? Shall I shew him in?

PETER. Yes, tell him to come along. And you might hurry up the tea. [*To* BROWN.] It's my election agent.

BAGGS *comes in.* *He is a dapper, competent looking man, neatly dressed.*

PETER. Hullo, Baggs, what's up?

BAGGS *glances with some surprise at* BROWN.

BAGGS. It's only about the meeting to-night.

He glances again, very doubtfully, at BROWN.

PETER. [*seeing the glance.*] Oh. Have you met Mr Brown? Mr Brown, this is Mr Baggs.

BAGGS. [*coldly.*] I have met Mr Brown.

BROWN. [*who has got up from his chair.*] How do you do, Mr Baggs?

PETER. That's all right, then. Sit down, Baggs. Tea's coming in a minute. Or would you prefer whisky and soda?

BAGGS. [*not sitting down.*] Neither, thank you. And I won't sit down. I have no time.

PETER. What a strenuous person you are. If I win this Election it will be all your doing.

BAGGS *evidently agrees.*

What about that infernal meeting? I'm sick of meetings.

BAGGS. This one is important. It is the

great Church Defence Meeting. The Bishop will be there.

PETER. [*standing with his back to the fire, lighting a cigarette.*] The deuce he will ! I say, Charles, how does one talk to a Bishop ? [*Turning to BAGGS.*] Look here, can't you leave me out ? Say I'm ill, or something. They'll sing a lot of hymns, I suppose ; and I shall be unutterably bored. I shall make an ass of myself for dead certain. I've got more or less on terms with Tariff Reform, but I'm blowed if I can make head or tail of Religious Politics.

BAGGS. [*patiently.*] Quite impossible. The Church vote is most valuable. You must secure that.

PETER. Well, I warn you, I shall most probably lose it if you put me on my hind legs before a pious audience. They won't like me a bit if I get going. I don't understand all this Church business. I was educated at a Public School and Oxford. Ecclesiastical subtleties were left out of the curriculum. Good sentence that, Charles. What ? And I'll be hanged if I'll sing the hymns.

BAGGS. They will have most of the hymns before you come on.

PETER. [*cheering up.*] Oh, will they ?

That's a thoughtful arrangement. But, see here, Baggs, I don't want to go to that beastly meeting. I want to go and have a look at the back streets with Mr Brown. I gather that the people in the back streets are interesting.

CHARLES *and* BROWN *both look at him in great surprise.* BAGGS *is visibly hurt.*

BAGGS. Did you come to Whitebridge to try to win the seat or to be interested ?

PETER. [*affably.*] To be interested, of course. I don't care a damn for the seat. *I* don't want to go to the House of Commons. Most boring place, by all accounts.

BAGGS. [*exasperated.*] I wish you had said so sooner.

PETER. Didn't I say so ? Poor old Baggs ! Charles, where the deuce is that tea ? [*To BAGGS.*] Of course, if you feel like that, I'll come. But—the Bishop ! He'll leave me speechless.

CHARLES. Don't you worry about him, Baggs. I'll see that he toes the line.

BAGGS. Thank you, Mr Wentover. [*He seems relieved.*]

PETER. [*cheerfully.*] Strenuous job running an honest candidate like me, Baggs, isn't it ? You ought to have opposed my adoption. What you wanted was one of the ordinary Party tame

rabbits—the sort of chap who would feed out of your hand every time you whistled. Cheer up. I'll come. I'll sing the hymns, and I'll talk rot like the rest of 'em.

BAGGS. [*doubtfully.*] Thanks.

The WAITER appears with tea-things.

WAITER. [*to PETER.*] There are two ladies asking for you, Sir.

PETER. Oh! Ladies! They aren't Suffrage ladies, are they?

WAITER. Oh no, Sir. They look quite respectable.

PETER. [*with a sigh.*] Oh—respectable! I'm a bit tired of respectable ladies. It isn't the Mayoress, is it?

WAITER. Oh no, Sir. They are not White-bridge ladies at all.

PETER. All right, shew 'em up. [*To the others.*] See me through.

LADY PATCHWAY and ALICIA JORDAN come in. PETER hurries towards them.

Lady Patchway!

LADY PATCHWAY *is wearing an enormous bunch of orange and red ribbon, and a large hat trimmed entirely in those colours.*

LADY PATCHWAY. Yes, Peter, we've come. I hope you are duly grateful. You dreadful boy.

PETER *is some time in recovering from his surprise.*

You don't seem a bit pleased.

PETER. [*laughing.*] I was never more pleased in my life. But—er—your arrival is a little unexpected.

LADY PATCHWAY. And you haven't even looked at Alicia.

PETER. [*with a deep bow.*] Can you expect me to look at anyone else when you are in the room?

LADY PATCHWAY. You mean, you are looking at my hat. I don't blame you. It is awful. But it's all for the sake of the Cause. I am going to wear it every day for the next fortnight.

CHARLES. [*who has come forward.*] Won't you have some tea? And—Lady Patchway, may I present Mr Brown, an old friend of mine, and Mr Baggs, Peter's agent?

LADY PATCHWAY. [*beaming.*] Peter's agent! How very delightful. I am afraid Peter is a very troublesome candidate [*to BAGGS*].

BAGGS. Not at all. [*He bows.*] If you will excuse me I must be off. [*He goes out.*]

LADY PATCHWAY. [*turns to BROWN. PETER takes ALICIA'S arm, and walks up the room.*]

What! John Brown! [*Shakes hands with enthusiasm.*] This is very delightful. But—Alicia—Alicia. [*She calls loudly.*] I've found the serpent in Peter's Eden.

PETER and ALICIA turn sharply. BROWN smiles and nods. CHARLES laughs.

ALICIA. Whatever do you mean, dear Lady Patchway?

LADY PATCHWAY. This man. Alicia, come and shake hands with him at once. He is my long lost perfect parson. John Brown, this is Alicia Jordan. She is going to marry Peter after the Election—as a reward.

PETER looks doubtful. ALICIA shakes hands with BROWN.

ALICIA. [*mischievously.*] Why does Lady Patchway call you the serpent?

LADY PATCHWAY. Because he is one, of course. There is more subtlety in John Brown than in the whole of Peter's family. He's dreadfully High Church, Alicia, so he will suit you. And he's a horrible Socialist, or something. I can't think what he's doing here. I expect he has a bomb or a knife or something under his cassock at this moment. [*She sits down at the table.*] Or, no—yes, please, Mr Wentover, we are simply dying for tea—it isn't Socialists who carry

weapons. It's Anarchists who do that. But I always mix them up. So silly of me—I never can sort out the different kinds of politicians. It is the Socialists who have a passion for truth. So very disconcerting. So very unkind of them. Don't you hate truth, Mr Wentover ?

CHARLES. [*busy with the tea-things.*] Oh, well, no, Lady Patchway ; I can't say I hate it. Truth, in moderation, is very helpful at times.

LADY PATCHWAY. [*to ALICIA.*] Is that clever ? It sounds clever. But I never know quite what Mr Wentover means. [*To CHARLES.*] Yes, please, *two* lumps

ALICIA. [*sitting down, and accepting a cup of tea from CHARLES.*] Usually he either means a great deal more than he says, or else he doesn't mean anything at all. Mr Wentover is a politician.

CHARLES. [*handing bread and butter.*] Thank you.

LADY PATCHWAY. [*to CHARLES.*] I wonder whether it was wise to trust Peter to you. John Brown, come and sit by me and tell me all about yourself. I haven't seen you for years and years and years. What are you doing in Whitebridge ?

BROWN. Living here, Lady Patchway.

LADY PATCHWAY. Living in Whitebridge !

But, whatever for ? Such a dirty place. Alicia, didn't I say in the cab that I had never seen so many unwashed people before ?

ALICIA. I didn't hear you.

LADY PATCHWAY. Then I must have thought it. [*To BROWN.*] Are you still working in the slums ?

BROWN. I am.

LADY PATCHWAY. How sweet of you. And do you teach all your people to wear nice clean surplices on Sundays, and swing incense-pots ? So delightful—incense : it always makes me think of the Hereafter. Do you think there will be incense in Heaven ? I'm sure there will. But—— [*Suddenly thinking of something else.*] will Peter win this Election ?

BROWN. You had better ask Baggs. He knows more about that sort of thing than I do.

LADY PATCHWAY. Baggs ? Oh, you mean that agent person.

PETER. [*who has been eating bread and butter, and drinking tea with enthusiasm.*] Please don't call Baggs an "agent person." He wouldn't like it. He's tremendous. He makes me do exactly what he pleases.

CHARLES. That's what an agent's for, Peter.

LADY PATCHWAY. Dear man ! Alicia, you

must get him to tell you how he does it. But, Peter, you haven't asked me why *I'm* here. I have come to help you.

PETER. [*doubtfully.*] Thank you very much.

LADY PATCHWAY. I am going to hire the best carriage I can get, and I am going to spend all my time driving about calling on people in this hat. That will win you hundreds of votes. Your wife ought to do it—but you haven't a wife; or your mother—but she won't.

PETER. And what about Alicia? Is she going to drive about too?

ALICIA. She—is—not.

PETER. [*bewildered.*] Then—— But haven't you come with Lady Patchway?

ALICIA. [*getting up from the table, and going towards the fire.*] Oh yes, I came with her; but I am not going to stay with her. Lady Patchway has a room in this hotel. I haven't.

PETER. [*also going over to the fire.*] Where are you going to stay? And what are you going to do?

ALICIA. [*laughing.*] You wait and see.

PETER. But—I say—you aren't? [*Light dawns on him.*] You aren't mixed up with that lot?

ALICIA. What lot ?

PETER. The Votes for Women crowd. They have a Committee Room in the High Street, next door to ours. Sporting little lot they are, too. They are backing me—I can't conceive why.

ALICIA. [*looking hard at him.*] Well, Peter, as a matter of fact I have come down here to help them. Don't be surprised if you meet me to-morrow, standing on a barrel at a street corner, haranguing the crowd.

PETER. [*with great enthusiasm.*] No ! Have you really ? Alicia, old girl, that's splendid. Just like old times. The next two weeks are going to be lively. I tell you what, we'll have a supper party. All your Suffrage lot, and some of my chief men. It will be great.

CHARLES. You'll have to catch your men first, Peter, my boy. You won't find it so easy as you think.

PETER. [*a little crest-fallen.*] Won't they come then ? Why not ?

CHARLES. [*to BROWN.*] Tell him, John.

BROWN. [*who has got up to go.*] The local Unionist leaders have no sense of humour. Consequently they are deadly opposed to the Women. The Vicar has preached against them :

the Mayor has been very rude to them: the Chairman of the Conservative Association has refused even to receive a deputation.

PETER. [*bewildered.*] But I thought you were supporting me.

ALICIA. By no means. We are opposing the other man. You see, we are always against the Government.

BROWN. [*smiling and picking up his cloak.*] You are the only live Politicians, Miss Jordan. The only people who count are those who are always against the Government.

LADY PATCHWAY. Come and see me to-morrow, John. I shall be dreadfully cross if you don't. And you can drive in the carriage with me. We will go and see your dear slum people. I shall take a big bag of bullseyes with me for the children—dreadful things, bullseyes, so sticky, but the children love them—and we will get them to make their fathers vote for Peter.

BROWN. I will come, Lady Patchway. But I don't think I had better drive about with you. I should clash with—er—your colours.

LADY PATCHWAY. Oh! Ah! Yes. I

forgot. You are a dreadful Radical, aren't you? But they will like my colours in the slums—won't they?

BROWN. I'm sure they will; and the children will like the bullseyes.

LADY PATCHWAY. [*thoughtfully.*] Bullseyes. Yes. Peter, do you carry a bag of bullseyes about in your pocket?

PETER. Good Heavens! No. Ought I to? Baggs never told me that.

LADY PATCHWAY. Of course he didn't. Men never do think of useful things like that. But the children are very helpful in an election. They sing songs all over the place and shew the popular colours. You take my advice, Peter—make friends with the children. Go and buy a bag of bullseyes at once.

PETER. Jolly good idea.

BROWN. Good-bye.

He goes out.

LADY PATCHWAY. [*to no one in particular.*] Fancy meeting John Brown here. One of my oldest friends. Such a dear—and quite mad. He actually believes what he says. So unusual in these days. John Brown is a saint. If only he were a Roman Catholic and dead they would make him a Beatitude. Is it a Beatitude?

I never can remember those Church expressions. [*Getting up abruptly.*] Mr Wentover, will you come and help me talk to the Manager? If there isn't a man with me, he will put me in the worst room in the hotel. Hotel Managers are all alike—they all take advantage of distressed elderly ladies.

CHARLES. [*picks up her belongings.*] With pleasure, Lady Patchway.

They go out.

PETER. [*turning to ALICIA.*] Well?

ALICIA. Oh, Peter. [*She stretches her arms over her head.*] It's going to be a lark.

PETER. I suppose it is. But, do you know, I'm beginning to see that there is more behind all this political rot than I thought.

ALICIA. [*looking at him with a question on her face.*] What do you mean, Peter?

PETER. Oh, I don't know. But it's more or less this way—behind it all there are men and women and children, and most of us never seem to think about them for a second.

ALICIA. [*sitting down, and looking hard at him.*] What's the matter, Peter? What has been happening?

PETER. [*cheerfully.*] I have been going to political meetings.

ALICIA. Yes ! And after that ?

PETER. [*less cheerfully.*] I have been exploring the town.

ALICIA. Well ?

PETER. Just you wait till you have explored the town. Then you'll know.

ALICIA. Peter, dear. [*Very quietly.*] I do know. It is because I know that I'm what you call a " Votes for Women " person !

PETER. [*nodding his head gravely.*] Oh, that's it, is it ? Then I wish you luck.

ALICIA. Thank you.

PETER. [*pensively.*] I suppose it isn't all beer and skittles—playing the game you people play, I mean.

ALICIA. It isn't.

They are silent for a little while.

PETER. [*suddenly.*] Why are you people backing me ?

ALICIA. Only because you are against the Government.

PETER. I see. And are you going to get me many votes ?

ALICIA. [*enthusiastically.*] I hope so. I hope we are going to make you win.

PETER. H'm. Yes. Is that wise? You remember our compact?

They look at one another. ALICIA shrugs her shoulders very slightly. PETER'S face is troubled.

CURTAIN

ACT III

The scene is the same, ten days later. Again it is late in the afternoon. Pinned to the pictures are specimens of election literature, large, gaudy, inflammatory posters, each offering warning or advice to the Whitebridge electors.

CHARLES *and* PETER *come in.*

CHARLES. [*looking about him at the posters.*] Hullo, what have we here? A striking exhibition.

PETER. [*cheerfully.*] Yes, isn't it? I got 'em sent up from the Committee Rooms, and I stuck 'em up myself. I thought I had better try to live up to them. They will help to remind me what it is I'm standing for.

CHARLES. [*fervently.*] They will. [*He wanders about from one to another, examining them critically.*] The artists don't seem to have left out much.

He stops before a big picture of a ferocious

*looking foreigner, in a very tight uniform,
with a sword between his teeth.*

Nice little bit, that.

PETER. Charming. That's a picture of the foreign joker who wants to scoff our trade. I'm up against him. That's to remind me that I'm a Tariff Reformer. They tell me that picture's very popular.

CHARLES. [*passing on to another poster.*] And what's this? Why—surely, Peter, this isn't part of *your* picture gallery.

He is looking at a picture of a very thin, miserable-looking foreigner in a blouse, with a belt strapped tightly round his waist, who is gazing longingly at a shop labelled "Horse Meat Butcher."

PETER. [*laughing.*] No, that belongs to the other side. That is to remind me of some of the arguments I've got to answer. I suppose some of our dear kind friends of the other side do really believe that is a true picture of a German thinking about buying his dinner.

He strolls over to the fire-place.

They are horribly concerned about the miserable condition of the protected foreigner. It's a pity they don't go and have a look at the food-shops patronized by some of their own

countrymen. Brrrr— [*He shudders.*] Charles, have you seen them? The worst sorts of food shops, I mean.

CHARLES. [*quickly.*] Yes. I've seen them.

PETER. [*beginning to walk restlessly to and fro.*] The other night when Brown took me round the town he planted me down before a food shop. He said it would do me good. It didn't. I was very nearly sick. There were nasty-looking, clammy bits of pig. There were greasy, grey balls of mincemeat, stuffed with lumps of yellow fat. There was half a pig's head—it looked very, very raw, and very, very ghastly. There were black-puddings. [*He shudders again.*] Do you know what a black-pudding is made of? Horrible! There were dreadful grey stringy things—you know, bits of pig that grow in the dark. [*He stops abruptly before CHARLES.*] Charles, the food of the protected foreigner can't possibly be more filthy than the food of the unprotected Britisher. [*Exploding.*] What liars we politicians are!

CHARLES. [*who has been continuing his tour of inspection of the pictures, turning and looking at him with a grim smile.*] So you call yourself a politician at last, do you, Peter?

PETER. [*shrugs his shoulders.*] I don't know.

But—I suppose I ought to own up to it. In a way I'm responsible for this. [*With a wave of his arm he indicates the picture gallery.*] I'm afraid I ought to be described as a politician. I deserve it. I've told a lot of lies in public lately. The funny thing is, that I don't seem to have been found out.

CHARLES *crosses the room and rings the bell.*
What are you doing that for ?

CHARLES. It is evident you need a drink. [*With great cheerfulness.*] Peter, my son, you are developing a conscience. It is an exhausting process. You certainly need a drink. But I congratulate you.

PETER. [*becoming cheerful.*] Jolly good idea. [*Confidentially.*] Charles, if this Election business goes on much longer I shall do something desperate. It's the most empty farce I ever was mixed up in. [*Thoughtfully, after a pause.*] But it's instructive.

The WAITER appears.

CHARLES. Get two whiskies and sodas, please.

WAITER. Two whiskies and sodas, Sir ; yes, Sir. [*Retires.*]

PETER. See here—they stick me up to talk to the crowd ; and they won't let me say one blessed word that matters. I'm expected to

spout oceans of gush about the Empire ; but if I begin to say anything about the people who make up the Empire, the Chairman or some one kicks me gently from behind, and I have to switch on to something else. I tell you, during the last week more than once I have been jolly near to turning round and telling the whole platform full to go to the devil.

CHARLES. [*crossing over and sitting on the arm of a chair by the fire.*] Ah. I shouldn't do that, if I were you. They might misunderstand you.

PETER. [*joyfully.*] It would shock them. It would do them good to be shocked.

CHARLES. No doubt. But you didn't come to Whitebridge to shock the leaders of the Unionist Party. You came to win the seat. Incidentally, you came to strengthen the influence of your family here.

PETER. Damn the seat ! And as for my family—it takes all it can get, and in return it gives—me ! *Me*, Charles ! My family has offered *me* to Whitebridge.

CHARLES. I wish that waiter would hurry up. You need that drink—badly.

PETER. *Me*, Charles. My family proposes to get *me* made Member for Whitebridge. I,

of all the people on this earth, am picked out as a fit and proper person to speak in—what the deuce is it they call it? The Council of the Nation—for the colliers, and the iron-workers, and the people who make chains and hooks and things; the people who eat the muck I looked at the other night in that shop.

He walks rapidly up and down and then halts before CHARLES.

It's too utterly ridiculous for words. And those absurd political jokers talk about Government of the People, for the People, by the People. It's a cock-eyed business.

CHARLES. [*looking squarely at him.*] Peter, my son, you are growing up. I thought I shouldn't waste my time if I brought you down here.

PETER. [*looking sharply at him.*] You thought!— You downy old bird!—

He is interrupted by the WAITER, who brings in the whisky and announces—

WAITER. Mr Brown to see you, Sir.

BROWN comes in.

CHARLES. Good! John, you've come at the very right moment. Our young friend has just taken his seat on the penitent's bench. He will now make open confession of sin.

He hands a glass to PETER, and raises the other himself.

Peter, here's to your continued reformation.

He and PETER drink.

BROWN. [*taking off his cloak.*] What's been happening? And—er [*looking about him*]—what are all these pictures doing here?

CHARLES. Those pictures are silent witnesses to our young friend's past depravity. He is going to decorate his new house with them, just to remind him——

PETER. Don't be an ass. I'm serious.

CHARLES. I know you are serious. That's why I'm joyful. John, you solemn old owl, he's got to the very bottom of the game. He has found out what it is the Politicians are after.

PETER. [*emphatically.*] I'm blowed if I have. [*Walks once up and down.*] I have found out what the Politicians are *not* after.

BROWN. [*sitting down.*] Ah, yes. And that is?

PETER. [*facing him.*] Everything that is of the faintest use to anybody. [*He begins to speak in dead earnest.*] Thousands of the White-bridge people live in pigsties, and the Politicians do—nothing. Quantities of them have to eat filth,

and the Politicians do—nothing. Struggling rate-payers are harried by the rate-collector, and the Politicians do—nothing. The White-bridge work-house walls are bulging with paupers—yes, I've seen them, Charles—and the Politicians do—nothing. Able-bodied workmen are sacked, and chucked on the scrap-heap to rot, and the Politicians do—nothing. Children are forced into school with no food in their little tummies, and the Politicians do—nothing. Kiddies paddle about in the mud with rotting boots, and clothes that are dropping to bits, and the Politicians do—nothing. And all the time I, a Politician, am expected to gas about Home Rule and Religious Education and Dis-establishment and all that sort of empty rot. Good God, it's about time the Germans conquered us and knocked our heads together. Here endeth the First Lesson. On this particular occasion there will be no collection.

He finishes his whisky and throws himself into a chair. BROWN and CHARLES look at him in some surprise, and for, perhaps, a moment, no one says anything. Then—

CHARLES. I say, Peter, have you told Baggs all this ?

PETER. Good Lord, no. Baggs——! The admirable Baggs would be horribly pained. Do you know [*sitting forward*] I believe he really is in earnest.

BROWN. Of course he's in earnest. He wants to down the other agent. It's a matter of bread and butter with him—and professional pride.

PETER. I see. [*He jumps up with a laugh.*] And, begad, I'm with him. Blow principle, and damnation to the other side!

He picks up his empty glass.

Charles, they don't give us much of a drink for sixpence in this place.

There is a knock at the door.

Come in.

The door opens and the WAITER appears.

WAITER. Mr Baggs and another gentleman to see you, Sir.

PETER. Right oh, send 'em along. [*To BROWN and CHARLES.*] I hope the excellent Baggs will like my picture gallery.

BAGGS comes in, accompanied by an opulent looking person in a fur coat and a soft hat, and with a big cigar. PETER hurries forward.

How are you, Mr Root?

ROOT. [*boisterously.*] I'm all right, thanks.

How's yourself? Good day, Sir [*to CHARLES*].
Good-day, Mr Brown [*to BROWN*].

PETER. What's up, Baggs?

BAGGS. [*who looks worried.*] There's a good deal the matter. That's why we are here.

PETER. [*affably.*] Jolly good of you to come. [*He rings the bell.*] What's the trouble?

BAGGS *looks at* ROOT.

ROOT. [*with great cheerfulness.*] We've just looked in to buck you up. Baggs thought you were getting a bit stale. No good getting stale—not yet.

The WAITER appears.

PETER. Get some more drinks. Mr Root, you will have a whisky and soda?

ROOT. Thanks. Don't mind if I do.

PETER. Baggs?

BAGGS. [*gloomily.*] Thank you.

PETER. Charles? [*CHARLES shakes his head.*]
Brown? [*BROWN also shakes his head.*] Right.
[*To the WAITER.*] Three whiskies and sodas.

WAITER. Three, Sir. Scotch?

PETER. [*looks at the others. They nod.*] Yes, please.

The WAITER goes out.

ROOT. [*wandering round the room and looking at the pictures.*] You've got 'em all up. Tasty

little bits, some of 'em, ain't they ? They ought to make the other side sit up. They can't touch us, not in the matter of posters. We've got the talent. 'Cos why ?

He faces the others and wags his head.

Because we've got the money. When we see a good thing we snap it up. Never mind the price. Blow the expense ! That's what I keep rubbing into our friend Baggs. Blow the expense. I don't mind putting down my bit.

BROWN. [*who is standing before the fire.*] I'm sure it does you credit.

ROOT. [*waving aside the compliment.*] 'Tisn't no credit to me, Sir. I'd pay a good bit to see them Liberals outed. There's Jenks, their head man—he did me a bad turn in business. I swore I'd get even, and so I will. Mr Baldwyn, you've got to beat 'em. If only we can turn their man out they'll be as sick as a waggon-load of monkeys with their tails cut off ; and it won't be *my* fault if they hear the last of it in a week of Sundays.

The WAITER comes in with the drinks.

PETER comes hurriedly forward and hands them round.

ROOT. [*raising his glass.*] Good 'ealth, Mr Baldwyn.

PETER *raises his glass cheerfully*, BAGGS *with gloom*.

As I was sayin'—them Liberals wants keepin' in their places. Good whisky, that.

PETER. Yes. It just occurs to me I'm guilty of corrupt practices if I pay for it. Charles, it will have to go down in your account.

ROOT. [*much pleased*.] Corrupt practices! I could tell you somethin' about corrupt practices.

He looks at BAGGS, who obviously is not pleased.

Couldn't we, Baggs?

BAGGS. [*shortly*.] You could. But [*he glances at BROWN*] there's no need to make a song about it.

ROOT. [*cheerfully*.] Oh, we're all friends here. We're all in for love of the game. All we want is to out them damned Radicals. I told Jenks I'd be even with him; and so I will. There's no humbug about me. I told Jenks what to expect. There's me, Chairman of one side, and there's Jenks, Chairman of the other. If we don't beat him you can call me a liar. This is very good whisky of yours, Mr Baldywn. [*Empties his glass*.]

PETER. Glad you like it. Have some more.

ROOT. Well—since you are so pressin'—

BAGGS. [*severely.*] I'm afraid we can't wait. There's that deputation in five minutes.

ROOT. [*not pleased.*] What deputation?

BAGGS. I mean the meeting of the Printing Committee. There's a fresh leaflet to get out.

ROOT. [*resigned.*] Oh, come on, then. Good-bye, all. [*Waves his hand.*] Sorry I can't stop. But we're not goin' to leave a stone unturned to keep them other beggars out. We're goin' to plaster the whole of the front of the Baldwyn Arms with orange and red posters. That'll fetch 'em. Spendin' money's the way to get votes. Isn't it, Baggs? Money—that's the thing that counts, in electioneerin', same as in everything else.

He makes for the door, which at that moment opens. ALICIA comes in. She is carrying a pair of sandwich boards with the device, "Keep the Liberal out," and is plentifully decorated with purple and white and green.

Hul-lo! [*He slips back a pace or two.*] Here, Mr Baldwyn—there's a lady to see you.

ALICIA. [*holding her sandwich boards so that he may see the inscription.*] You will—won't you?

ROOT. You bet. Trust us.

ALICIA. [*shaking her head.*] I don't know about trusting you. Would you give us the Vote if you had the chance ?

ROOT. [*laughing rather inanely.*] Oh, now you're askin' questions. You—wait and see.

He rubs his hands and chuckles.

ALICIA. Don't you make any mistake. We shall hammer your side when your turn comes, if you don't play the game.

ROOT. [*crestfallen.*] I believe you will. Come on, Baggs.

ROOT and BAGGS go out.

ALICIA. [*turning to CHARLES.*] That's Mr Root, isn't it ?

CHARLES. Yes—Peter's boss—the man who is running the show.

ALICIA. [*feelingly.*] Poor Peter !

She props her sandwich board against a chair and sits down.

He has always led such a protected life. And now— [*She shakes her head.*] Poor Peter !

PETER. [*looking at her.*] What's up ? Shall I get you a whisky and soda, too ? The other politicians seemed to want it.

ALICIA. No, Peter, thank you. Tea, please.

PETER. Oh, tea. Right you are. Ring the

bell, Charles. [*To ALICIA.*] Having a good time ?

ALICIA. Rather ! I've had three frocks spoilt already. The Whitebridge mob is—mobbish. It enjoys throwing mud.

PETER. [*starting forward.*] What do you mean ? They haven't . . . !

ALICIA. [*laughing.*] Haven't they ? You men don't know what electioneering means. How many bricks have you had through your windows, Peter ?

PETER. None, of course.

ALICIA. Ah—we have had seven. The Whitebridge mob seems to take more interest in us than it does in you.

BROWN. [*who has been smoking quietly.*] Of course it does. You deal in facts. He [*indicating PETER*] only deals in fancies. The mob appreciates facts. Either it takes them to its bosom, or it heaves bricks.

The WAITER appears.

PETER. Tea, please.

WAITER. Tea, Sir ? Yes, Sir. [*Goes out.*]

PETER. [*to BROWN.*] I'm afraid you are right. But—what can one do when there is a chap like Root at the head of affairs ?

BROWN. Root deals in facts all right.

PETER. Yes—but what kinds of facts? Root is a gross materialist. Alicia is a— What is it you are, Alicia?

ALICIA. [*promptly.*] I'm a materialist, too. I want a vote.

PETER. [*wearily.*] Yes, I know. But what else do you want? Votes aren't of the faintest use to anybody.

CHARLES. Steady on there. Peter, where are you getting to? You mustn't say that during an election.

PETER. Oh, blow the election! It's true.

CHARLES. [*with mock severity.*] How many times must I tell you that Truth and Electioneering don't go together?

ALICIA. Peter, I'm afraid you men are very dense. You won't see what it is we are really after. [*She points at the sandwich boards.*] Do you imagine we enjoy all that? Do you suppose we like having mud thrown at us? Do you think we like being vulgar? Yes—vulgar. It is impossible to be mixed up in English politics without being vulgar.

PETER. Oh, hang it all! I admire your pluck, and all that; but surely it isn't necessary to be vulgar.

ALICIA. [*seriously.*] Isn't it? We are told

we can't do what men can do. We can—even to the extent of being exceedingly vulgar. After all, being vulgar is only coming down to the common level. And it is you men who have set the standard.

BROWN. That's true—unhappily. We *have* set the standard. At election times we do ask ladies to do all sorts of very vulgar things.

The WAITER comes in with tea. CHARLES comes to table.

CHARLES. Sugar, Miss Jordan? No. [*He pours out a cup of tea and hands it to her.*]

ALICIA. [*taking the cup and turning to BROWN.*] What do you think about it all, Mr Brown? I mean—I suppose you aren't taking any part in the election. Don't you wish you were? It's very stimulating.

BROWN. [*nods.*] It is. You are quite right, Miss Jordan. An election is most stimulating. Why—the bulk of my slum folk *seem* to be perpetually half drunk just now. [*With a cheerful laugh.*] No doubt it's only Political Fervour, though.

PETER. [*chuckles.*] Political Fervour! [*He pours himself some tea.*] I know something about that Political Fervour. Root sees to some of it,

and his enemy Jenks looks after the rest. They supply it in barrels.

ALICIA. Ah—bribery! That will be something fresh for me to talk about.

CHARLES. I shouldn't, if I were you. Politicians get very restive if you talk about bribery. And, after all, what's the good? Both sides do it, so no one is a ha'porth the worse. Political Fervour, in quart pots, is a good old English institution.

ALICIA. [*emphatically.*] I don't agree with you a bit. We want more decency in politics.

CHARLES. I hope you won't get it. Politics, made respectable, would be unbearable. Imagine an election with no—er—Political Fervour! Why, we should be having candidates who believed in their own wares next. Think of it. The electorate would perish of boredom.

PETER. I say, Charles. I thought——

CHARLES. [*interrupting.*] Peter, my son, don't. Remember, you are the candidate. What!

He turns sharply as the door opens and LADY PATCHWAY hurries in. She is dishevelled. Her hat is tilted to one side. The orange and red ribbons are dragged. She seems exhausted.

LADY PATCHWAY. [*dabbing at her face with a handkerchief.*] Yes, here I am. But I thought I never should get here. Alicia, is my hat straight ?

ALICIA. It isn't.

LADY PATCHWAY. [*sinking into a chair which PETER gets for her.*] I thought as much. Peter, I'll never go electioneering again for you or for anyone else, so long as I live. So demoralizing. So fatiguing. John Brown, when are you going to convert the people in your slums ? *Dreadful*, my dear. Yes, please [*to CHARLES, who as usual attends to her wants*], lots of sugar. The doctor says I shouldn't, so I will. Most embarrassing. And at my time of life. I assure you, my carriage pulled up somewhere in your parish, and before I knew where I was there were ten men and women and countless children, dancing a sort of war-dance round me, and singing a most horrible song. I felt like a heathen goddess. Most improper.

CHARLES. Did they pour libations, Lady Patchway ?

LADY PATCHWAY. Three or four of them were holding jugs and they kept pouring something out of them into their mouths.

CHARLES. Ah, yes. Political Fervour, no doubt.

LADY PATCHWAY. Is that what it's called? My dear, one of them came up to me and offered me his jug. Most polite of him. He had such nice eyes. Why is it all slum men have such nice eyes?

BROWN. [*quietly.*] They haven't.

LADY PATCHWAY. [*sitting up sharply.*] John Brown, that is unworthy of you. You, in your sacred calling, should see only the best in everyone.

BROWN. I try to. But eyes are not always the best part of my friends in the slums. Quite a number of the eyes will be blacked before the election is over.

LADY PATCHWAY. [*forgetting the eyes of the slum folk.*] Peter, I've won you scores of votes.

PETER. Thank you very much. It's awfully good of you. I hope you won't overtire yourself.

LADY PATCHWAY. But I shall. We women always do. Look at Alicia. [*They all look at ALICIA.*] I don't agree with her views a bit—Women ought not to have votes; their proper sphere is the home; but she is over-tiring herself, and that's the main thing. Alicia, have you won many votes?

ALICIA. Hundreds.

LADY PATCHWAY. Dear me. What a pity. If only you would come and help me get the people to vote for Peter——

ALICIA. But that's exactly what I am doing. At least, I am getting people to vote against the other man. It comes to more or less the same thing in the end, doesn't it, Peter ?

PETER. [*gloomily.*] It does. I wish you wouldn't.

ALICIA. [*looking squarely at him.*] Oh. Why do you wish I wouldn't ?

PETER. [*putting his hands in his pockets and beginning to wander round the room.*] I agree with Lady Patchway.

He pauses before one of the posters and studies it carefully. It is a picture of a woman rocking a cradle containing a baby with an enormous bottle.

ALICIA. Well ?

PETER. [*pointing at the picture with his thumb.*] That's what I mean. A woman's proper place is her husband's home, looking after her babies.

ALICIA. [*starting up.*] Peter!! But supposing she hasn't a husband—or any babies ?

PETER. Then she should jolly well go and get some. I'm sick of politics.

ALICIA. May I ask who has been talking to you lately, Peter ?

PETER. [*bitterly.*] Scores of people—*deadly* people. People with *views*. There was the Vicar—he was one of the last of 'em. He's chock-full of views. And there was the treasurer of the football club. He hadn't any views, but he had a jolly long tale of woe. His beastly club seems to be bankrupt, and he wanted me to promise to set it on its legs. He said he'd get the football interest in my favour. He said it was worth having.

He walks into the middle of the room, very moodily.

I *loathe* the football interest—it so seldom gets anywhere near a ball, except by accident, and it *never* gets good and muddy. I tell you, I'm sick of politics. It's a sordid business.

ALICIA. Who talked to you about us ?

PETER. [*looking up.*] Eh ? Oh, I was coming to that. The Vicar, of course. He got very peevish. He said you all ought to be locked up and whipped.

ALICIA. Oh, did he ? I shall have to go and call on the Vicar.

PETER. [*with still deeper gloom.*] I shouldn't,

if I were you. I argued the point with him, and got the worst of it.

ALICIA. [*scornfully.*] He converted you ?

PETER. That's what a Vicar's for, isn't it ?

LADY PATCHWAY. [*who has been nodding, suddenly wakes up.*] Alicia, just look at my hat.

ALICIA. [*sweetly.*] I have been looking at it.

LADY PATCHWAY. [*sighs.*] It's awful, isn't it ?

ALICIA. Well——

LADY PATCHWAY. Don't prevaricate. You know it is awful. I've worn it for days and days and days ; and I'm going on wearing it. Now do you believe I'm in earnest ?

ALICIA. I never doubted it.

LADY PATCHWAY. Then why don't you come over to our side and help ?

ALICIA. I told you just now I was helping.

LADY PATCHWAY. Did you ? I didn't hear you. I suppose I wasn't listening. So fatiguing to listen all the time. John——

BROWN. Yes, Lady Patchway.

LADY PATCHWAY. I envy you. If I had been a man I should have been a clergyman.

BROWN. I am sure you would. But—may I ask why ?

LADY PATCHWAY. Because a clergyman so

seldom has to do any listening. He can talk as long as he likes, and the poor congregation have to pretend they like it. I don't wonder at the decay of religion. Now, if only the congregation could do the talking, church-going would become quite popular. But, Alicia, I've told everyone that you are on the other side. I'm sure you said you were. I suppose you changed your mind.

ALICIA. I never change my mind.

LADY PATCHWAY. Don't you? How boring. But then, of course, you are intellectual. Thank Heaven, I'm not. Mr Wentover, you are intellectual, too—at least, you often say things I don't understand, so I suppose they are clever—do you ever change your mind?

CHARLES. Very often, Lady Patchway.

LADY PATCHWAY. I thought so. What is the matter with Peter?

PETER *is still wandering about, gloomily studying his posters.*

CHARLES. Peter is developing a conscience.

LADY PATCHWAY. [*horror-struck.*] Dear me! How dreadful. I never had a conscience. Peter, come here this minute.

PETER *comes dutifully.*

PETER. Well—God-mamma!

LADY PATCHWAY. If you talk like that I cannot refuse you anything. What's the matter, you poor, dear boy? Has Alicia been teasing you?

PETER. [*rather more cheerfully.*] Not more than usual. At least, I don't think you have, have you, Alicia?

ALICIA *laughs and shakes her head.*

ALICIA. Not so much as you deserve.

LADY PATCHWAY. What is the matter, then?

PETER. Everything. But it would bore you if I told you.

LADY PATCHWAY. [*sitting up and shaking her head at him.*] Peter, have you not learned yet that *nothing* bores me. Do you think I should be in Whitebridge now if I was easily bored?

PETER. [*very frankly.*] Yes, I do. Whitebridge interests you tremendously. That chap with his jug of beer pleased you no end. Nobody ever offered you a drink out of his jug of beer before, I'll bet. They don't do that sort of thing where you've been up to now.

He begins to walk about again.

Imagine my father taking a pull out of a jug of beer and then offering it to you. You can't. He doesn't drink beer; and, if he did, he'd want it all for himself. He wouldn't

hand you his jug. He would tell the butler to go and draw you a jug-full for yourself. More refined, perhaps, but less sociable. Well, that's what's the matter with me. Whitebridge interests me, too—horribly.

CHARLES *and* BROWN *and* ALICIA *look at him with great interest*, LADY PATCHWAY *with bewilderment*.

LADY PATCHWAY. But, Peter, I don't like beer; and I think Whitebridge is a perfectly horrible place. It is dirty——

PETER. [*explosively.*] I want to come and live here. I want—I'm blowed if I know what I want.

LADY PATCHWAY. [*severely.*] Then it is time you did know. I think you want a good shaking. You will be Member for Whitebridge by this time next week.

PETER. [*bitterly.*] Yes, that's the devil of it. I beg your pardon—I mean, I'm afraid I shall.

LADY PATCHWAY. Peter!

PETER. As soon as I'm Member for Whitebridge I shall have to—[*he glances at ALICIA, who shakes her head and looks at him meaningly*]—that is, oh, I shall have to go and sit in the House of Commons.

LADY PATCHWAY. Ah.

ALICIA *seems relieved.* CHARLES and
BROWN *glance meaningly at one another.*

I always said your father was a fool to send you into politics.

PETER. [*starting forward.*] Did you really?
[*He seizes her hand.*] Did you say that? Thank you, Lady Patchway.

He raises her hand to his lips.

CURTAIN

ACT IV

The scene is the same, a few days later, about ten o'clock at night. The posters are still pinned to the pictures.

Standing with his back to the fire is LORD SUNNINGHAM, glaring at nothing in particular. He is dressed in a blue serge suit, and he seems to be in a very bad temper. LADY SUNNINGHAM is sitting in an arm-chair. She looks tired. Evidently she has had nearly as much as she can stand of LORD SUNNINGHAM'S ill-temper.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. Infernal hole this. Worst dinner I've eaten for years. It is a pity they can't run a decent hotel in a town of this size.

LADY SUNNINGHAM. I expect they can't afford to.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. Then they ought to be able to. Whitebridge is rich enough. There's pots of money in the place. It's one of

the best manufacturing towns in the Midlands.

LADY SUNNINGHAM. Is that why it is so dirty ? Manufacturing towns are always dirty, aren't they ?

LORD SUNNINGHAM. No need to be. I shall write to the Mayor about it.

LADY SUNNINGHAM. Do you think he will take any notice ?

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*sharply.*] He will have to take notice. He's one of my tenants.

LADY SUNNINGHAM. Oh. Does that make any difference ?

LORD SUNNINGHAM. Certainly it makes a difference. I shall insist on Whitebridge being made clean.

LADY SUNNINGHAM. Won't that be very expensive ?

LORD SUNNINGHAM. I daresay it will. That's not my look out. The rate-payers will have to pay.

LADY SUNNINGHAM. Oh. But—if they don't mind the place being dirty, why should you interfere ? *They* have to live here : *you* don't.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*savagely.*] Susan, don't be a fool. I own most of this infernal town. If the place isn't cleaned up soon, some confounded

Radical newspaper man will get to work writing libels about *me*. They are doing it about other landowners already. The country's going to the devil, when a gentleman can't own a town without being slandered in some ha'penny rag or other. I wish we hadn't come near the place.

LADY SUNNINGHAM. [*quietly.*] Yes. Why did we come ?

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*explosively.*] Because I want to be the first to congratulate Peter, of course. That's why I wired for rooms in this tenth-rate hotel.

LADY SUNNINGHAM. Suppose he isn't elected ?

LORD SUNNINGHAM. I will suppose nothing of the sort. The Whitebridge people know better than to reject the only son of their chief landlord. They aren't fools.

LADY SUNNINGHAM. [*rather maliciously.*] I thought you said no one but a fool would live in Whitebridge.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. Well, nor he would— if he could help it. But they can't help it. They've got to live here. [*He strolls across and examines one of the posters.*] Vulgar show ?

LADY SUNNINGHAM. Yes. Do they always have those things at elections ?

LORD SUNNINGHAM. I believe so. The electors like them. Eh—who's there? [*as the door opens, LADY PATCHWAY comes in. She is very dishevelled indeed.*]

LADY PATCHWAY. Susan! Sunningham! [*She hurries forward.*] What are you doing here? Surely it is most improper for a Peer to interfere in an election. Peter will get unfrocked, or something dreadful. What is it they do to Members of Parliament who get elected against the rules? Or, no, that's when they give the electors beer. When did you come?

LADY SUNNINGHAM. Sunningham insisted on coming down at the last minute. We wired for rooms, and here we are. We got in after everyone else had had dinner and gone out.

LADY PATCHWAY. [*sitting down.*] You haven't been giving the electors beer, Sunningham, I hope?

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*emphatically.*] I haven't.

LADY PATCHWAY. They call it Political Fervour here. I can't think why. I don't understand these manufacturing towns. But it makes them dreadfully tipsy. One of them—I don't mean a town, but a person—said he would vote for Peter if I would kiss him. Just like the Duchess of Devonshire—you know—or was it

the Duchess of Rutland ? I can't remember. Didn't she give a ball on the eve of the Battle of Waterloo ? So romantic of her.

LADY SUNNINGHAM. And did he get his kiss, Jane ?

LADY PATCHWAY. I told him he should have it *after* he had voted for Peter. It is never safe to trust a politician. He might have sold me—just like a Cabinet Minister. So you've come to see Peter elected. I'm afraid you'll be disappointed. Peter has got quite cheerful.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. If Peter is cheerful, why should we be disappointed ?

LADY PATCHWAY. [*sitting up gleefully.*] Oh, Peter wants to go and live in a slum. Members of Parliament don't live in slums. He feels sure he's beaten : so of course he's cheerful. Sunningham, should *you* like to be Member for Whitebridge ?

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*startled.*] Indeed, no ! Why ?

LADY PATCHWAY. Poor Peter ! The Prevention of Cruelty to Children people really ought to look after the younger members of the Aristocracy. Sunningham, if you were a coster they would give you six months with hard

labour. But you never had any conscience. Just like all the rest of your family.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*bewildered.*] But I thought you were down here helping Peter.

LADY PATCHWAY. So I am. I don't want him to be beaten too badly. And I had to keep an eye on Alicia. Such nice children—Peter and Alicia—if only she wasn't intellectual. [*Turning to* LADY SUNNINGHAM.] Susan—Alicia's a militant Suffragette. Stands on a barrel and lets people throw mud at her. Revels in it—not the mud: the Militancy. What she'll do with a vote when she's got it, I don't know. She won't sell it for a pot of—er—Political Fervour, because she doesn't drink it. But that's all they seem to do with votes in the slums—where Peter and Alicia are going to live after they're married.

LADY SUNNINGHAM. [*sharply.*] Whatever nonsense are you talking now, Jane? Peter and Alicia are going to live in London. We've arranged all that.

LADY PATCHWAY. Have you? Suppose they upset your arrangements? Suppose they agree that they won't get married at all.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*visibly upset.*] What!!

But they couldn't. Why, Alicia has £30,000 a year, and Peter will have the title after me. Of course they'll get married.

LADY PATCHWAY. [*shaking her head.*] Peter and Alicia are very modern children, and they've been running loose down here. I shouldn't wonder if it's a case of "the children have eaten sour grapes, and the parents' teeth are set on edge."

LORD SUNNINGHAM. Don't be profane, Jane. That's out of the Bible. I don't approve of bringing the Bible into everyday life. I don't like it.

LADY PATCHWAY. [*shaking her finger at him.*] O Sunningham, you haven't grown up a bit. You always were a big baby.

WAITER. [*appears at door, and announces*] Mr Brown.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*to LADY PATCHWAY.*] Who's he?

LADY PATCHWAY. John Brown, my pet parson.

BROWN comes in. He hesitates, glancing from LORD and LADY SUNNINGHAM to LADY PATCHWAY.

Susan—this is one of Peter's chief supporters.

LADY SUNNINGHAM. [*comes forward, smiling*]

graciously.] I am delighted to meet Peter's friends at any time.

They shake hands.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*also shaking hands.*] How do you do? At what time will the result of the poll be known?

BROWN. At any moment now, I think.

LADY SUNNINGHAM. [*eagerly.*] And has Peter won?

BROWN. [*shakes his head.*] I can't say; but—— [*He shrugs his shoulders.*]

LADY PATCHWAY. Go on, John. Finish your sentence. You mean, you hope not.

BROWN. [*laughs.*] No, Lady Patchway, I wasn't going to say that at all.

LADY SUNNINGHAM. Do you really mean Peter is beaten?

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*wrathfully.*] Nonsense.

BROWN. I am afraid so. But we shall know for certain almost at once.

LADY PATCHWAY *looks in wonder at*

BROWN.

Yes, truly, Lady Patchway. I am sorry.

He turns to LORD SUNNINGHAM.

If the people here had sense enough to elect your son, they would have a chance of being really represented, for the first time on record.

He is beginning to get a quite amazing grasp of what this place really is. He wants to come and live here.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*grimly.*] Oh, does he ?

BROWN. He is finding out that a grimy manufacturing town like this is intensely interesting—just because it is so very thoroughly alive.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. Hum. He'll soon get over that.

BROWN. [*looking hard at him.*] I hope not, Lord Sunningham. After all, he has reason to be interested in Whitebridge.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. Yes, he'll own most of it some day. [*He turns away.*]

BROWN. [*earnestly.*] That is why he wants to get to know it properly.

LORD SUNNINGHAM *is about to reply, apparently in opposition to this suggestion ; but suddenly the window is lighted up with a green glow.*

BROWN. Ah. That settles it.

They all hurry over to the window.

Peter is beaten. Green is the other man's colour.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. The other man !

He and BROWN turn away from the window.

Do you mean that Whitebridge has thrown out my son ? [*He is very angry.*]

BROWN. I'm afraid there is no doubt about it.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. Then—— [*He stamps his foot on the floor.*] Susan, you must collect your belongings. We will leave this place at once.

LADY PATCHWAY. Don't be silly, Sunningham—there isn't a train.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. My car is in the garage.

LADY PATCHWAY. You can't drive fifty miles at this time of night.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. I can, and I will. I never was so insulted in my life. For Whitebridge to reject Peter is a direct attack upon my authority. I'll never set my foot inside the place again.

LADY PATCHWAY. Don't be ridiculous, Sunningham. Whitebridge wouldn't mind a bit. Whitebridge supports you: you don't support it.

LORD SUNNINGHAM *turns in fury on her ; but at that moment the door is flung open, and CHARLES and ALICIA rush in. They are both excited.*

CHARLES. John—Peter's completely outed. No end of a majority.

He catches sight of LORD and LADY SUNNINGHAM.

Oh! I say—I'm awfully sorry for you. I didn't know you were coming. I'm afraid, Lady Sunningham, you are disappointed. But it will do Peter no end of a lot of good.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. Charles! May I ask how it will do Peter good to be publicly insulted by the electors of Whitebridge?

CHARLES. [*gazing in amazement at him.*] Good Heavens! But they haven't insulted Peter. He is very popular. They don't like his politics—that's all.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. I don't agree with you. But we won't discuss it now. This is a great blow to me.

LADY PATCHWAY. [*maliciously.*] Of course it is. For the first time in his life Peter has upset your arrangements. Dear Peter. I shall kiss him when he comes in. Alicia won't mind.

ALICIA. [*gloomily.*] No, I shan't mind.

LADY PATCHWAY. [*cheerfully.*] And you are beaten too. Poor Alicia. But I warned you. I told you you should join with me. It serves you right.

ALICIA. [*rather wearily—sitting down.*] Yes—I suppose it serves me right.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*to ALICIA.*] I'm sorry to hear you came down here to oppose Peter.

ALICIA. [*nodding at him.*] Horrid of me, wasn't it?

LORD SUNNINGHAM. I regret it very much indeed, Alicia. I don't approve of women mixing in politics at any time. I suppose I am old-fashioned.

LADY PATCHWAY. You are—dreadfully.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. But for a woman to oppose her future husband—

LADY PATCHWAY. That's the modern fashion, Sunningham. You *are* behind the times.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*with a great show of forbearance.*] Strikes me as hardly decent.

ALICIA. [*laughing.*] But, you see, I didn't oppose Peter. I worked for him. Perhaps that's why he has got beaten. Mr Wentover, do you think there's any coffee going?

CHARLES *hurries across to the bell.*

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*to LADY SUNNINGHAM.*] Are you ready Susan?

LADY SUNNINGHAM. [*shakes her head.*] I really cannot face a fifty mile drive to-night.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*with a look of resignation.*

As you will. But we leave first thing in the morning.

There is a crash on the door which flies open, and PETER comes in.

PETER. [*shouting.*] Charles—Brown—I'm out. [*Sees LORD and LADY SUNNINGHAM.*] Hullo! I say—Good evening, Mother. [*Goes up to her and kisses her.*] This is a little unexpected. [*To LORD SUNNINGHAM.*] I'm beaten, you know. Awful majority. Very sorry for you, of course, and all that. Charles, ring that bell.

CHARLES. I have just rung it.

PETER. Then ring it again. I want a drink, badly. Lady Patchway, I'm sorry you are disappointed, after all you've done. And Alicia——

He looks a little uncomfortable.

ALICIA. We are accustomed to being beaten.

CHARLES. But why aren't you making speeches, Peter? You ought to be explaining your defeat to your supporters.

PETER. Oh, I skipped out of the Town Hall by a back door, and came on here. I don't suppose they'll mind. They've had about enough of me.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. It looks as if you had been disgracing the family, Peter.

PETER. [*cheerfully.*] I have. I have been speaking the truth. It cost me hundreds of votes.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. Then——

PETER. [*facing him, with a look of determination on his face.*] I really have been speaking the truth. I owed it to the town and to my conscience to do it. Blow the Election! Blow the House of Commons! Blow the whole show!

LORD SUNNINGHAM. [*explosively.*] Peter! Have you gone mad?

PETER. I expect so. Anyway, I have discovered that we—the family, I mean—owe Whitebridge a jolly sight more than it owes us. I expect that sounds mad.

LORD SUNNINGHAM. It does.

The WAITER comes in.

PETER. Go and get a lot of whisky.

CHARLES. And some coffee.

The WAITER bows and goes out.

PETER. [*walks solemnly round the room and pulls down the posters.*] That's better. Alicia [*leads her forward*], you remember our bargain?

She looks at him and nods her head.

PETER. I'm *not* member for Whitebridge.

ALICIA. [*not quite steadily.*] No.

PETER. I don't suppose I ever shall be.

ALICIA. [*still less steadily.*] No.

PETER. Are you sorry ?

He looks at her hard, and she looks equally hard at him.

ALICIA. [*softly.*] Are you ?

PETER. [*puts his hands in his pockets.*] I don't know.

LADY PATCHWAY. [*coming up.*] What are you two talking about ? Peter, I said I should kiss you for upsetting your father's arrangements, and so I shall. [*Kisses him.*] There !

PETER *looks very much surprised.* LORD SUNNINGHAM *looks very much annoyed.* CHARLES and BROWN *look at each other and laugh.*

LADY SUNNINGHAM. Really, Jane !

LADY PATCHWAY. And now you must kiss Alicia, and thank her for all the work she has been doing for you. It has cost her *three* frocks, Peter. I've seen them. They are absolutely ruined.

PETER. [*looks at ALICIA.*] *For a moment she*

looks down and away. Then suddenly she turns to him, and faces him with a happy smile.] By Jove !

He puts an arm round her impulsively, and they kiss.

CURTAIN.

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